

## Emery Peabody

No one thought that there was anything different about Emery Peabody. Nobody noticed that his eyes were a bit too close together or that his left foot pointed slightly outward when he walked. Emery Peabody was your average 5'6 white male, brown tousled hair. He wore a lot of polos, and came from a very middle class family. Emery Peabody fought in the Iraq war, and when he got out he continued on to social work. His office was plain and often too cold. His workplace prior, the desert, had been hot and most of his days had been haunted by loud eruptions and dusty air. Emery's surroundings changed a lot. Nobody *had* thought much of Emery Peabody at all. Who would've thought an interview of him at Mountain View Medical would go viral. Who would've thought that I'd be here listening to it?

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"I'm going to let you in on a secret. I've never told anyone this story before. I guess it's kind of how I got here. I don't really think anyone would understand, maybe that's why I keep it to myself. I wasn't always in trouble... I used to be the one who kept others out of it. I was a soldier first, social worker second. My mother came to me crying yesterday, begging me to explain to her where she went wrong. I don't think she did anything wrong, I don't think anyone did anything wrong. I guess I'll begin this story at the time when my obsession first started. It was all an accident really. I left a window open in my kitchen, the screen had been broken, and I awoke to not one, but two birds dancing in my living room. They were so distressed, but so beautiful while being so. At first I was confused, and nervous that one might try to attack me. I guess I didn't want them to leave me. My position at the department of social services had been split into two, and I had been left with the on-call job. They only depended on my attention two to three times a week, and what else did I have? I had been so lonely, I hated to admit it, but I had been. I decided to keep the birds. They were loud sometimes, and they knocked over a lot of my shit. I soon realized what I could and couldn't keep in my house. Fruit on the counters was a bad idea, and I rolled up my nice oriental carpet to save it from all the shit. Plants were also a no unless I wanted soil and leaves strewn throughout the house. Both birds were female robins, I wondered if they were ever jealous of the males and their bright red feathers. The girls were stuck with such a pale color; it wasn't anywhere near as attractive. But I liked it. They gave me something to look forward to every time I came home from work, and every time I woke up. Until I woke up. It was a Saturday, and as soon as I exited my dreams I realized that the normal morning songs were either too quiet or missing altogether. I groggily made my way downstairs to see what was going on. The first thing I spotted was the blood, it wasn't much, but it clashed greatly with the white carpeting that stopped at the end of my stairs. My heart began to race quickly, and I turned the corner

unprepared for what I was to see. The little demon's head was cocked, looking at me as if she was saying "Got a fucking problem?" Beneath the one female was the other, slain, on her side, both eyes gouged out. There was bird blood on my floor and on the beak of the murderer. In a fit of rage and confusion I grabbed the broom that was propped up against the fridge. I chased the thing around my house for what seemed like eternity. Its evil chirps of death rang throughout my home like they owned the place. This continued until finally the thing took a unique turn, and flew down into my basement. I stood at the top of the stairs, broom in my hand, peering through the darkness. The only time I had been down there was when I had moved in, just to look at the stone dungeon that it withheld. I wasn't even sure why or how the door had been opened, all I knew is that it shouldn't have been. I slammed the door shut as hard as I could, and wouldn't open it again until my passions took flight.

I pondered and paced for too long. I missed all of my scheduled work appointments and never took a call. At night, and only at night, I could swear that I heard the robin's song clearly. It was beautiful and haunting all at the same time. I wondered what it meant. Wondered if it was about me. I researched how long it should take a bird to die without food or water. Tops three days. Well, now it had been multiple weeks and I still felt its presence. I had dealt with loss before, and I'd even killed in the war. However, I couldn't shake this feeling of darkness accompanied by beautiful song.

I needed to drown out the noise. So, I added to it. I had the realization one morning about a month after the incident. I ran through my house, opening every window and popping the screens right out. I flung open my back door and let the breeze hit me like an epiphany. I was going to be happy, I was going to be normal again. I had run down the street to the locally owned drugstore. I wasn't even sure if it had a name, the only sign out front was just of a big "RX". At the unnamed drug store I had bought all of the birdseed that they had on the shelf, which was only three bags. The young girl at the counter gave me a funny look when I went to check out, and kept popping her gum, it bothered me even after I left. It was a beautiful summer day, and I realized that I hadn't appreciated any of it until now. I couldn't remember a time when I felt that I enjoyed nature. The last time I spent extensive time outside was during the war, but that was in the desert. Maybe that's why I didn't really favor the sun anymore. I thought about the therapy that had been offered to me when I got back to the states, they said it would be free, and I may even be able to get special benefits. I didn't want to deal with it, but maybe I should have. Maybe I wouldn't have had to deal with all the stupid drama at the office. I still couldn't believe that they'd give me the fucking shit job, after *five* years. Come on.

When I made it back home there was still nothing different, no birds, no life had ventured in. I thought of how clever I was to use bait, and ripped open the first bag. I sprinkled some seed on the windowsills first, but not too much. I didn't want them to stay there and attract attention. I continued to sprinkle the seed into my living room, but again not too much. I put the most by the outside of the basement door. I heard the singing. It was beautiful, and calm. I felt as though I was being tricked, or lured just like these birds. No, this bird was a demon, a monster. I opened the door, and as quickly as possible I disposed the rest of the seed into the dungeon.

Now, I waited. I sat on my dark green sofa that had belonged to my father and opened up a book. But it was too hard to focus. I realized that I must be somewhat still to make this place welcoming to any visitors. I wondered if the other birds would be able to sense what I did. How could they not? They were smart, intuitive creatures. They knew when a storm was coming, and could steer clear of it fairly easily. I thought that I was lucky that the robin only still sang at night, or else surely it would warn the other birds. Or, maybe it would want them here, so it could deface their corpses as well. The thought unnerved me, and I wasn't sure if that's what I wanted. But I *needed* to sleep, needed to get rid of the murderous song, even if it meant more noise. My thoughts were interrupted by a change to my right. If I had not been waiting it was a noise that I probably would've ignored- one of those natural movements caused by who-knows-what. But I knew. I tilted my head gently to get a view of the creature. A small dark colored finch perched itself on my windowsill, its head bobbed as it engulfed the seeds that I had provided. Happiness flooded my veins; the presence of another life was in my home once again. It didn't take long for others to notice the food, and to feel comfortable. The more birds that took interest, the more they attracted. Soon the amount of seed on each of the windows was beginning to diminish. My plan was working. The creatures began their journey into the house, with caution at first. Many of them turned their heads; but their beating eyes seemed to never leave my position on the couch. I sat still, but my heart pounded. I wondered if they could sense the movement in my veins. I knew how intuitive some creatures were. These birds must've been blinded by their stomachs, for they quickly began to enter my home. There were so many different kinds. I had thought I knew many species, but this experience showed me very quickly that I had limited knowledge. There were large, medium, and small, and the colors ranged from dark browns, yellows, reds, white, and blues. I suddenly wished that I were documenting. I should've set up a camera on the mantel above the fireplace. I should've researched later which species introduced themselves to me. Now it was too late, I couldn't move unless I wanted to ruin everything. There was no doubt in my mind that if I were to lift so much as a finger the creatures would take flight all over my home and find their ways out through the windows. I thought back to the war. I remembered a mission in the middle of the summer. We were in the desert, and the Middle Eastern air was extremely hot and dry. Our mission was to obtain information, which we could only do by getting close to the enemy and tapping radios. I had been with three men, Jones, Boone, and Frederick. Our task was dangerous, and one wrong move could give us away. We camped out in the desert only five miles away from our target, and during the day we would climb into the hills to get the signals we needed. There was one morning when we awoke to foreign sounds. Humans. Luckily they had been in the distance and we had just enough time to take shelter behind brush where our stillness decided our fate. We weren't found that time, but later I heard about Frederick getting blasted during a similar experience a couple years later after I was already out. I thought about him. I wondered what had happened, had he sneezed? Breathed too heavily? I hoped to god I that wouldn't do either. I knew better, I had better control. That was why I was still here. There was something so magical about the position that I was in. I had so much power. I controlled the fate of many with minimal effort. My plan progressed

just as I wanted it to. Birds began to disappear, hopping gently through the doorway and into the darkness of the basement.

I need a glass of water, is that all right? I won't say anymore until you get me one. I'm only given three a day but if you want to know what happened you'll have to up it to four.

Thanks.

I miss my home. Even when it was empty there was something nice about having your own space. I didn't do very well living in my parents home though. I think I liked not having anyone to tell me what to do. I liked taking a shower at 2am, and eating whatever I pleased regardless of the sodium and fat levels. My mom was a health freak, just like the people here. They make me take so many vitamins it's unnerving. Someday I might just become a big ol vitamin, or a vegetable.

Thanks for the water; I suppose you'll want to know what happened now.

Well, they all hopped right on into my basement. A couple of them flew off when they had eaten their fill, but that was OK. I had so much company that a few didn't matter. When I felt that the room had been filled with the most I would get, I stood slowly. There were still some pigeons making their way around in my living room, I didn't want their reaction to alert my guests downstairs. At first the pigeons cocked their heads and stared at me with their black beady eyes. How I hated them. How they reminded me of my poor robin and her murderer. My motivation strengthened in these moments and my heart told me to act quickly. To hell with my gentle nature. I stood straight up, and as the pigeons took flight in my home, knocking into bare white walls struggling to find an exit, I felt as if I were walking on air. I took swift and long strides to the cellar door, which I slammed as hard as I could when I saw dozens of creatures flying towards me. In the process I had clipped a wing, half of it stuck out into the hallway, while the other half was still attached to a mad, panicking bird in the basement stairwell. I couldn't help. I walked away, out of my house, just to get some air.

I wasn't gone very long. My stroll earlier that day had inspired me to get out, something that I rarely ever did. I didn't see a single bird in the neighborhood. When I returned I was horrified by the amount of shells and seed on the floor. I didn't like things out of their place, so I swept. The loud chirps from the basement cheered me on. I got to the door, where the dusty blue wing still protruded. I knew it was now dead. Kind of like me, the stress of the day had made me so tired, so I went back to the couch. Something inside of me felt so very empty, I had done what I had needed, but now what? It seemed that life had come to a halt, and I felt so very lonely even with all of the life beneath my feet.

I began to nod off, but not for long. Soon I would hear a knock at my door. But, I thought, it is past four, and the mail never comes later than that. I began to feel panicky, and wondered if someone was seeking revenge on me for my mistake. I grabbed something from the kitchen for protection, and went to the door. Upon opening I saw that it was just my neighbor, whose name I never knew and still cannot remember. I know that his hair was dark; he was older, smaller than average but had a bit of a gut. I believe he said, "hi, uh I know we've never appropriately met, but I just thought that I'd check on you.." I must've looked confused because he continued right away, "There is excessive noise coming from your basement, and it

sounds, very odd. Do you think some animals may have gotten in there? You might want to call animal control, my cousin actually works for the department." I shook my head, unsure of what to say, what to do. This could ruin everything. I thought quickly, "Noise? I haven't heard anything." Of course he must've thought that I was crazy. "What, really? Maybe I've gone mad. This may be odd, but would you mind if I just take a peak in your basement? I could've sworn.." A lightbulb went off in my head, something exploded, something warm and happy dispersed in my soul. "It's a mess in here, I'd hate to have that be your first impression of me." I said innocently. The man shook his head and chuckled, "Least of my worries! It'll just help me sleep tonight if I know no poor animal is stuck down there." I stepped aside, letting my arm drop, motioning my acceptance of his entrance. I slid the kitchen knife into the waistband of my Levis. He walked quickly, but I could sense him surveying my home. Nothing looked out of the ordinary, and so he seemed trusting. Something odd began playing in my mind. I felt as if an orchestra were performing just for me. Maybe it had just been all of the birds, and maybe it wasn't just for me. "Man something is definitely down there!" My neighbor turned around to show his expression of concern. I still shrugged my shoulders, "are you sure you're ok?" he shook his head in disbelief, and went for the door, seeing the wing he said shakily, "shits not right," he turned the knob. I got ready. He pushed the door. I moved closer. Birds flew at us, I pushed him hard. I slammed the door, turned the lock, listened to his screams for only a moment, until they conformed to sound just like another chirping bird.

I came to the conclusion that the birds would eat him alive. When the seed was gone, they would rip apart his flesh with their sharp beaks. They would feast until there was no more, and that is when they would die as well. The neighbor had elongated the process, but it was ok. I felt whole again, maybe that's what I had been missing. There had been more of a purpose, and I had found it. The noisy neighbor had to go. Oh, that's all? You don't want to hear more? Why not? Isn't this what gets you guys off? Don't you love hearing the details, trying to get me in for more time than what I've already got? Hahahaha. No I don't want more vitamins, stop trying to make me take them. Let me rot then, why should my life go any other way? Hahahaha. I couldn't save Benny, and I couldn't save my robin, I can't save myself! They wont let me outside. They say that when I see the birds I'm not "normal." What the fuck is normal. I see my neighbor, black holes for eyes, nose completely caved in. A bloody mess in my basement. Someone reported the smell. They never would've got me! Hahahaha. Never would've known if it didn't reek so bad. I didn't mind it much, it kept my mind going, kept me feeling full. I didn't need another fix, and I couldn't hear my robin's murderer any longer. But now, hahahah it's okay. I don't want to go back there anyways, don't let me be alone. Please don't let me go back there. I like it here. I'm never alone. I've got so many birds, and they all get along. They don't kill each other. We get along. We're all here together. Make sure they don't take my birds away. "

That's where Emery Peabody's tape ended.